

Polite society, we are told, welcomes neither religion nor politics in everyday conversation. Well, I guess this is going to be an impolite sermon, then, because we're going to talk about both. And how can we not? We are Christian citizens of the United States of America, and Scripture has plenty to say about navigating our way through life as both Christian and citizen.

Let's start here: God has revealed the directions for national strength in a program that is surprisingly simple. Now these words of God say nothing about imports or exports; inflation or deflation; unemployment; bailouts or campaign finance reform. They don't even mention the words Democrat or Republican. Yet these words are intensely practical. They drill down to the first cause of everything helpful and the cause of everything destructive to our nation. Here is God's direction for building a better nation, from Proverbs 14: 34: "Doing what is right makes a nation great, but sin will bring disgrace to any people." Sin destroys. Righteousness—not just believing the right things but actually doing right things— builds a nation.

When God warns that "Sin will bring disgrace to any people," this is not theory; this is not pessimism—this is history. Where is the mighty Roman Empire today? Where is the world dominion of Alexander the Great? Where is the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics? And this is more than history book stuff. We see the ugly results of greed in our own nation today. The Biblical concept of marriage and family is disintegrating before our eyes, and in the families that are together, living in relationship with God is seldom the top priority. We hear every day about environmental disaster, ballooning national debt, the erosion of lawful and representative government. Behind all this, in one form or another, is the sure consequence for every uprising against God.

Here it is again: "Sin will bring disgrace to any people," no matter how wealthy, how large, how proud, or how brilliant. Don't think that we are too strong or too resourceful to fall; if our programs and plans disregard divine truth, dethrone God, and smile on the carnivals of sin, no matter how ingenious or scientifically correct these plans may be, they must fail. Over the lost glory of every nation both the hand of God and the pen of history have written the verdict, "The disgrace of sin."

However, that is not the only word God has for us: remember, He also says, "Doing what is right makes a nation great." This is not merely idealism talking—this too is history! Wherever people have been inspired by Jesus Christ to do the right thing, they have proven themselves to be the "salt of the earth" that has prevented decay. Early Christianity changed the world of its day, exalting marriage, children and parenthood. The first Christians brought honesty and love to cultures that had never thought such a way of life was possible. Christian missionaries literally changed entire regions through the power of the Gospel message. And these things still happen when Christians are courageous enough to actually live out their faith!

Of course, Christians must vote intelligently and prayerfully. But more than this, the United States needs Christians to be Christian—to not just go to church but be the Church, so that our

fellow citizens will be persuaded by our lives lived to God and attracted by the goodness of Jesus that they see in us.

Every single day, Americans are bombarded with promises of happiness and fulfillment: just buy this product; try this exercise system; go on this diet; read this book; practice these principles; take advantage of this government program and you will get what you want. And if that doesn't work, entertain yourself to death. But the Christian Church has something better for our people; the one power that can create a clean heart and a right spirit within—and that is faith in Jesus Christ, his cleansing blood and his victorious resurrection.

To overcome the disgrace of sin for you, to break the curse of death in your life, to free you from the nightmare of hell, your heavenly Father did not simply overlook sin. Instead, he sent his only Son, Jesus, to carry on the cross in his crushed and bleeding body my sins and yours. He sent His Son to stand before the bar of eternal justice and plead guilty for us, to take upon himself everything sinful and wrong in our lives, to pay the penalty for sin on our behalf, to bring us full forgiveness of that sin and to open the gate of heaven to all who believe this. This is the most vital message of all human history; this is life; this is heaven and eternal blessing. Believe it, because he did it for you. Even if you have been living like God doesn't matter and that you matter most, listen to this: Even at this moment, your heavenly Father invites you to turn around and come back to Him. His arms are open wide, and so is his heart. Reconciliation, forgiveness, and peace are real, thanks to Jesus and his suffering, death, and resurrection.

When Jesus is your Savior, the faith in your heart will show itself. You will have the gift of the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures and the Sacraments by which sinful passions are tamed, selfish desires removed and small faith enlarged. You will want to make Jesus known to people, so that they can experience this peace and new life as well.

This is what our country needs more than any Senate legislation or government program. You and I have been chosen to be ambassadors, by which people are introduced to Jesus Christ and the great gifts that He loves to give. In these critical, decisive days, we still have the freedom to speak of Jesus and to peaceably come together around His Word and Sacraments. May the Spirit make us bold to seize the opportunity our freedom affords us; to broadcast, in word and deed, the power and love of Jesus. With Jesus in more American hearts and lives, we can be a great nation, doing what is right, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.